

## **First Principles**

*Lord, what a privilege it is for us to bear Your name. We pray that You will hallow Your name in us to enable us to live lives worthy of that name by which we are called, that we may do everything in word and in deed in the name of our Lord Jesus and glorify our Savior. Be with us now, we pray, as we discuss how Your Word bears upon issues of our current day. We lack wisdom. We ask of you to give us wisdom beyond our experience that we may have insight and that we may be helpful both to ourselves and others. These things we ask in Jesus' name, amen.*

For this session I have prepared lectures on the first table of the law, the first four commandments. I have divided it into two headings. My first heading is to deal with the prologue in the first three commandments under what I call, "First Principles."

The prologue and the first three commandments seem to go together in a special way. I have already commented on the prologue earlier in the course. In the prologue, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," God identifies Himself as the sovereign liberator of His people. What follow that prologue are ten principles for a liberated life. These are the rules of life for those whom God has redeemed from bondage to worship and to serve Him, the living and true God. That, by the way, is an allusion to 1 Thessalonians 1:9 where Paul mentions the Thessalonians and praises them for how (by God's grace) they turned from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven. The Bible is full of those kinds of liberating texts. Some have called the Ten Commandments "the ten great freedoms." I think that is useful, but I would rather refer to them as "the ten principles of a liberated life." God works by His Word and Spirit to enable us to live lives for His glory. These are the ten comprehensive principles that He has given to us in order that we may use our freedom for His glory.

The first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," directs us to the principle of singleness of heart. It obviously does not imply that there are other gods. It is that we manufacture other gods that supplant our worship of the true and living God. Calvin is famous for saying that the human heart is a virtual idol factory, and it does not shut down; it goes seven days a week. He did not say that; that was my gloss on Calvin, but you get the idea. Our tendency as fallen human beings is to have divided loyalty. So, the heart of the first commandment is that it calls us to exclusive loyalty and devotion. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart..." The positive side of this is the expression of our loyalty and devotion to God our Savior with all of our heart. Above all, I think we should underscore "trust in God alone." Scripture not only tells us to love the Lord our God with all our heart but to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not to rely on our own understanding. In all our ways, we are to acknowledge Him. He will direct our paths. This calls us to love and trust the only God that there is. He is the only one who can help us and the only one who can save us, for there is no salvation in any other. I think in our pluralistic, relativistic, postmodern age, we need to hear that because there is a tendency in our hearts to compromise the commitment to the one living and true God.

The Jews have a custom. Upon arising every morning they say the *Shemah*, which is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one..." It is not a bad idea in our relativistic age to repeat that because there are very strong tendencies to go against that. Many people regard it as arrogant on our part to say that there is only one true and living God—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, that is the truth and we live in the light of the authority of Christ who claims all authority in heaven and on earth and sends us forth with the mission. So part of our singleness of heart is

propagation of the only God that there is, the only Savior that there is, in our mission outreach. This is in light of the scope of Christ's kingly rule over all the nations with all authority in heaven and earth, and we may expect opposition on that point. People accuse even Mother Theresa of religious imperialism because she claimed that the love of Christ constrained her to devote her life to helping the poorest of the poor. The attitude of the opposition is "You cannot make absolute claims." We do this in a non-arrogant way, but there is a humility that comes with the knowledge of the true and living God. It is not something that we have discovered on our own but something God has graciously revealed to us. Yet, we are called to exclusive loyalty and to propagate Him as the one and only living and true God, the only Savior.

Our hearts get divided in many ways. Typical things that we substitute for God, things that we glory in or we trust in are money, power, fame, sex, and acceptance. There is no end to the list of ways in which our hearts need to be purged in order to serve the living and true God. I think that in the world abroad there are two gods that we should probably mention. Romans 1:23-25 shows us how people "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, birds, animals, and reptiles. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator." That is the heart of going after other gods. It is going after things in the creation and substituting them for the true and living God.

One emphasis we need to make is on not worshipping the creation rather than the Creator because, for some time now, radical people have blamed the environmental crisis on biblical monotheism. As long ago as 1974, Arnold Toynbee called for a return to a once universal nature-reverencing pantheism. He has many New Age followers. His argument was that the sacredness of the universe is what will enable us to save the planet. Well, that has been tried. We will not save the planet by bowing the knee to Baal. Baal was a nature religion, and we need to resist that worship of the creation rather than the Creator. I think we can destroy the planet by bowing the knee to mammon. A potentially destructive element of human life is when people, for profit, begin to gain control over the world's food supply through genetic engineering. And that is global. We need to be in the forefront of questioning those kinds of maximum issues as well as searching our own hearts for worship and service of God alone.

So the first commandment is far-reaching in its implications—both personal and social. There is much more that can be unpacked in terms of worshipping and serving the Creator rather than anything in the creation, which ultimately leads to destruction of ourselves and even the earth.

The second commandment says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol [...] You shall not bow down to them or worship them." It calls us to purity of worship. I think it is important as we memorize and communicate the second commandment that we include both those parts—not to make an image of anything that is in creation and not to bow down to or worship idols. It takes us beyond having only the living and true God as our God, which should be obvious. There is still a problem even having God as our God. There is a tendency in the human heart to substitute self-willed worship that limits God. Inevitably, a human projection that limits God is unacceptable to Him. And any image that you might derive from creation to try to represent the invisible God is going to fall short of who God is. It cannot capture Him in His being. Therefore, Scripture says that a voice was heard when God spoke the Ten Commandments in the great theophany surrounded with phenomena that demonstrated His power and holiness. But the emphasis in Scripture is on the spoken word rather than anything that we might construct by which to worship Him.

In Reformed circles this principle is known as the regulative principle. The idea is that with respect to worship, what God has not commanded is forbidden. That is, we must have more than a negative

silence; a positive warrant is required for worship to be acceptable to God. You can check the Scripture proof text in both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism that trace that theme through Scripture. God alone is able to tell us how to worship Him. Therefore this principle, while it seems like it provides a limitation, is actually in the interest of Christian freedom. If we begin to give people the idea of imposing on us what they think is appropriate worship rather than biblical worship, then they bind the conscience to the commandments of men. It is, in its essence, a liberating principle although it sometimes asks for an over-literalistic interpretation in its application. Still, in its concept, it protects our liberty to worship God in only those ways that God has prescribed. Otherwise, what would prevent a church from having a milk-and-honey Sunday? If it is true that as long as God has not forbidden it we can do anything, there is no commandment against having a milk-and-honey Sunday. Why not have one? All sorts of alien ways of worshipping God may be introduced. So, the regulative principle is best understood as a corollary to Christ's rule in His Church. As king and head of the Church, Christ has revealed, through his apostles' teaching and practice, His will for us, and the church has no right to impose doctrines, ceremonies, or structures that have no warrant in the Word of God. That is not limited to the express teaching of Scripture, but it is also based on legitimate inferences from Scripture. I think that we should always welcome the opportunity when challenged to construct a biblical, theological basis for what we are doing in the case of worship. For example, when challenged on the idea that we should sing psalms only and not hymns, I think that it is appropriate for us to develop some biblical, theological response that shows how there is a necessity that we be explicit in terms of our hymns of Christ. That is the proper approach rather than to simply repudiate people who raise objections. The right way to approach that is to take seriously those objections and to provide a biblical rationale as long as we are not held to a literalist interpretation in terms of the principles that are given in God's Word. There are various circumstances that I think are extraneous to the principle that are just matters of common sense. If the regulative principle is applied in good faith and common sense, then it serves to really free us to worship God in those ways in which He has prescribed.

I think you should distinguish between a rigid mentality that is defending forms that have developed historically and that is elevating them to the place of Scripture from a legitimate, biblically sensitive application of the principle. Do not forsake the principle because some people are insisting on an over-literal basis for it or confusing the principle with forms that we have developed in the Reformed tradition. There is a lot of freedom within these biblical principles, but always be prepared to defend it in terms of biblical principle. Challenge the idea that people are seeking too explicit a proof text from Scripture that is inhibiting us from fulfilling the principles of Scripture. We ought to be grounded in the principles of Scripture on the basis that only God can teach how He is to be worshipped. The Scriptures are sufficient for all sorts of cultural forms being adopted in it. If you look at Psalm 150, musical instruments are there. There are trumpets. They were not brass, but that is an extension. There are flutes, harps, and stringed instruments. There are percussion instruments, including cymbals. If something is not on that list, it does not mean it is forbidden. That is a representative list. It means that all the cultural instruments by which music is made are appropriate in bringing them to bear on the worship of God. So, be reasonable about how specific the Scripture representations are. Then I think you restore the freedom that that regulative principle was originally intended to bring to us—to free us from the doctrines and commandments of men. Well, I used an absurd example of a milk-and-honey Sunday, but you get the idea that it is not just what we think would be good; it is what God thinks. So do not forsake the principle in light of rigid interpretation.

So is God the only one who can define what worship should look like? Yes. Only God can prescribe the ways in which He will be worshipped. It is clear through Scripture that God does give detailed instructions for how He will be worshipped. Worship is something He reserves for Himself through the whole of Scripture. All of the tabernacle furniture, everything that was in there, was oriented toward the

worship of God. And serious consequences flow from not following the ways in which God has ordained in Scripture.

I have been asked whether there is a mentality that is reflected in the movement known as Theonomy that also overlaps into this area. I would that say you need to distinguish those things out. Let us not engage in guilt by association so that if we reject a position on one ground we reject other things. We should examine liturgical worship. The Bible is not against liturgy, but the Bible is against imposing forms that are alien to people. People need forms in which they can express themselves to God, and those are culturally determined. So, I think good faith and common sense are needed for eliciting an authentic response from God's people. Some people do not find liturgical worship authentic for them. I happen to prefer that, but I recognize that this is something that I am partially conditioned toward and that there are other more fluid forms by which God is rightly worshipped. That is the principle, and that is why we are suspicious of churches that elide the first and second commandments, that take them together as one. There is a distinct principle between singleness of heart in which we exclude all other gods and purity of worship of the true and living God. That is a significantly different principle.

The third commandment is "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God" and has to do with integrity of life in word and in deed, in speech and behavior. It sounds like it is talking about speech and it is, but not exclusively. To bear God's name in vain is really the thought that is there. When you look through the Scriptures, you do find an important use of God's name in vows. I think that there is a broader aspect of the commandment, as I read the Scriptures, in terms of what this commandment is really about. Look, for example, at Numbers 6:27. (This follows the Aaronic benediction.) It says, "So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them." That was the privilege of hearing God's benediction—that God's name is being placed on His people with the promise of His blessing. Other examples of that are in Matthew 28:19, which says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and the book of Acts says we are baptized into the name of Christ so that we bear that name. As you know, believers are first called Christians at Antioch because they bear the name of Christ. Paul presents the problem of the second commandment in Romans 2:23-24. Here has just gone through the Ten Commandments and shown how those who bear God's name are challenged by the commandments. Verse 23 says, "You who brag about the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law? As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'" Now that is a life that contradicts one's profession. The seriousness of that is that profession of faith places upon us the name of our Savior. We do not have time to do it now, but take a concordance and look up the word "name" and observe how often it is a theme to live worthy of the name of Christ. "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." It is the most serious offense against this commandment. We do not live up to that glorious name that has been placed upon us in our baptism and which is expressed on us as God's ministers pronounce His blessing upon His people.

James 1:27 is also instructive in this regard. We usually think of the first three commandments as having to do with religion, which is right. They are the ways in which God is directly served so that the vertical relation is the primary relation and it comes to expression in what I call these first principles of the first three commandments. But remember James 1:27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." You move from singleness of heart and purity of worship to integrity of life. It is a very natural flow in terms of the way in which singleness of heart determines purity of worship and integrity of life. The first three things in principle include all the rest in that if we are single in heart, seek to worship God in purity, and bear His name in reality rather than in vanity, it overflows into the loving obedience that is toward our neighbor. There is much more that can be developed out of that in

terms of how those first principles relate. We are not as familiar with their implications as we ought to be. We need to bring out what their intention is in terms of the way God has given them as a summary of how we are to live liberated lives before His face.

My second major topic is the weekly Sabbath. This is the most controversial of the Ten Commandments in terms of its perpetuity—whether it is binding on Christians today. There are four difficulties that people feel about the Sabbath commandment that make it a little harder to comprehend on the same level with the other nine. The first actual mention of keeping the Sabbath is in Exodus 16. It comes rather late. Why is it not reflected in the patriarchal literature? Why do we not hear about it before Exodus 16? Well, a counter argument is that we do hear it in Exodus 16. It does not mean that silence means it was not being observed before. But it certainly does not have the prominence that it begins to have after the Exodus when God gathers His people and certainly reveals to them His Sabbath and makes it a special sign of His covenant with them as a nation. The second difficulty that people feel is that there is no connection with observance on our part in Genesis 2:2-3. We read there that God rested on the Sabbath day and set it apart. It seems that He set it apart for Himself. There is no record that He communicates to Adam, “Adam, after your first week of work, we will return to this day and rest together.” It is just there as a bare record that God set apart the Sabbath day and hallowed it. But even that record is not without some point. Even though it is true, it does not go on to say God communicated all of this. There is a pattern that is there. Six days plus one did develop and is somewhat reflected in Genesis. In Genesis 29, for example, you already have time periods divided into weeks. So maybe that should not count decisively. The third difficulty people feel (I get this probably most frequently. I got it in Ukraine, for example.) is that keeping the Sabbath is not explicitly maintained nor specifically mentioned in the New Testament. All the other nine are explicit, but the Sabbath commandment is not and that bothers people. Does that mean that it is for the Christian church today? Along with that, there is a fourth difficulty that Christians did not observe this as a day of rest until 321 AD when Constantine passed an edict that made it the day of rest. They gathered for worship in the morning and in the evening, but it was not anything really parallel to the Jewish rest until that late in church history. But, of course, that does not come out of the blue from Constantine. There is something that led up to the development of a desire to have a fuller Sabbath period.

So those are the four typical difficulties people have with the Sabbath commandment. I will try to go over an argument that I think answers those objections and gives us a firmer grasp on the rationale for the Sabbath. Let me add my observations to it. I have a preliminary observation to make on the place of the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. It is transitional. The first three commandments have to do directly with our vertical relationship with God: singleness of heart, purity of worship, and integrity of life before Him as we bear His name. Those are three principles that relate directly to God. Of course, integrity of life overlaps with serving our neighbor because we cannot bear God’s name without being concerned with the things that God is concerned with. Justice, righteousness, mercy, and faithfulness are His attributes that are the pattern or the model for our replication. But largely, they do focus on the divine/human relationship whereas we notice that the fourth commandment has both vertical and horizontal directions. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh is a Sabbath day to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.” Think about what a blessing that is to laborers. It is not only a command that we take rest, which in itself is a blessing. We must understand that to take a day in which we are not responsible for continuing our work is itself a blessing but we must also give that blessing to those who are under our jurisdiction. I found this note in a book by Marilynne Robinson. You do not need to know her name, but the book, titled *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* had a lot of provocative thoughts. This is what she said about the Sabbath: “Moses forbade”—it was really God—“servants, even

foreigners, should work on the seventh day. If their wage was subsistence, as it is usually fair to assume in pre-modern societies, then this prohibition had the immediate practical effect of securing for them seven days' pay for six days' work. He raised the value of their labor by limiting access to it. In all its latter day forms, the Sabbath has had this effect." There is a tremendous economic principle going on here that is to the advantage to those who labor. You cannot grind people down if they have a day in which they are required to rest. It is a sign of paradox that you are required to rest. You are required to take rest but also to give rest. That means that I think we should see the fourth commandment as transitional. It has a vertical dimension, as we will see, but it also clearly has human and inter-human aspects as well.

Here is the way that I would work out the material on the Sabbath. First, let us look at the weekly Sabbath in the Old Testament, and there are two points to be made. The first is it is grounded in the order of creation. That is the force of Exodus 20:11, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day." So, it is an imitation of God's pattern of work and rest at the creation. How did God celebrate the Sabbath? Exodus 31:17 gives us a glimpse into that. It is really the celebration of God's satisfaction over His work. God takes delight in the works of His hands. So the human Sabbath would be a finite replica of that celebration. At the human level, we pause from our labors to take satisfaction in them as we consecrate them to God. John Frame made the comment, "If recreation is pleasurable activity different from one's daily labors, then Sabbath rest is recreation *par excellence*." Part of rest is the relaxation from the daily grind that opens us to other things. Isaiah 58:13-14 says, "Refrain from doing your pleasure [doing your will] on the Lord's day." But if rest, including the activities that provide for renewal of our physical energies, is grounded in creation, then I think that the Sabbath is more than just a workday in a different sense. It is also grounded in redemption. This is the thought that is added in Deuteronomy 5:15, which says, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." There is a redemptive element, and certainly the celebration of Israel was to celebrate their release from bondage. So the idea of entering God's rest becomes associated with the Sabbath and is repeated in the New Testament (Hebrews 4:9, for example). In the Old Testament there was an anticipatory aspect to the Sabbath in the hope of entering God's eternal rest.

I think that we have to consider the weekly Sabbath in the inter-testamental period. There were two developments in the inter-testamental period. One was very positive and the other one was negative. The first development was the synagogue, and that was not in the Old Testament. It developed in the inter-testamental period, but it was an institution that was approved by God. It was appropriate for the Sabbath day. Leviticus 23:3 talks about the Sabbath both as rest and holy convocation. It did not specify convocation, but the synagogue developed as the holy convocation. Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and the apostles use that as the starting point for the launching of their mission. It is to be carried over to the New Testament.

The second thing to develop was the oral tradition. It later became written and is now known as the *mishnah*. In it you had all the technical details that were added in order to protect the Sabbath, but that elevated the traditional keeping of the Sabbath above God's concerns for the Sabbath in the Old Testament. So Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees on the Sabbath is an interaction with the oral tradition that was added in those intervening years between the testaments. The oral tradition consisted of many regulations including the idea that taking a handful of grain in order to stave off your hunger pangs was threshing and inappropriate. Jesus brought back a renewed emphasis on the Sabbath being in line with God's merciful intent and not in the way the oral tradition had developed. It is a mistake to think that Jesus' critique of the Pharisaical observance of the Sabbath is a critique of the Sabbath

institution itself. I think it is much more plausible that He recovers the original Sabbath intent from those accretions that occur during the inter-testamental period. So He ignores those rules and walks about on the Sabbath, allows His disciples to do things, and heals on the Sabbath. It seems to make a point of challenging the oral tradition without overturning the Sabbath legislation.

We come now to the weekly Sabbath in the New Testament, and I have three points to make. The first is to notice the text on which we base the idea that the Sabbath continues. I think that the key text here, the most important single Scripture on the weekly Sabbath, is Mark 2:27, which says, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” That is in the context of recovering the Old Testament weekly Sabbath from the oral tradition that had surrounded it. Notice what Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” The oral tradition had come to the point where all those rules and regulations had implied that man was made for the Sabbath and so the point of human existence is to observe the Sabbath. It seems to me that Jesus goes back to the creation order in this verse and says, “No, the order is that the Sabbath did not come first. Man was made first and the Sabbath was made for man.” And it appears in Genesis that God takes rest on the Sabbath day. God’s taking rest on the Sabbath day has its implication of observance for man. Man was created on the sixth day, and the Sabbath is made for man. It is not as though the Sabbath already existed and then man was made in order to keep it. It is, rather, the opposite. Think about the permanent relevance of the creation order—sixth day, man; seventh day, rest. It harks back to creation the very language Jesus uses, and the order with those events takes us back to creation.

The second most important single verse on the Sabbath is Mark 2:28. It says, “The Son of man is Lord even over the Sabbath.” That is to be thought through theologically. That is Christ saying, in effect, “I am the Lord your God, and what I say with respect to the Sabbath and what I do with respect to the Sabbath is in the exercise of my Lordship.” So He both alerts us to the purpose of the Sabbath—it is made for man—and He also asserts His Lordship over the Sabbath. Now, that prepares us for the element of change in the New Testament observance of the Sabbath. You have to think theologically here rather than looking for an explicit text. You have to think of the significance of Jesus rising again on the third day, which is the first day of the week. That was intentional on Jesus’ part. It was not by accident that He was crucified on Friday and rose from the dead on the first day of the week. This was all a part of His plan, and He begins then to meet with His apostles on the first day of the week. He continues meeting with them until the time that He is taken up into heaven. The events that are recorded are first day events. And then when does He send the Holy Spirit? He sends the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which if you count it, that 50th day is the first day of the week. So we need to observe those two events that were of such great magnitude in terms of the history of redemption. These great redemptive events—His resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by which the church is gathered in the fullness of this dispensation—were self-consciously chosen by Jesus.

With that background in mind, my second point is that we begin to observe apostolic practice, which establishes the first day rather than the seventh as the day of Christian observance. Look at Acts 20:7. They are meeting on the first day of the week. And 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 says, “When you meet on the first day of the week, let everyone lay aside for this collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.” Again, you have to think theologically about it. The pattern that the apostles follow is Jesus’ own pattern of being raised from the dead on the first day and sending the Holy Spirit on the first day. What He has set as a model of gathering on the first day, they continue. Our hermeneutical principle is that the apostles were established as the foundation stones of the Church. They were established to lay the foundation of the Church. What they laid by way of foundation and in terms of their teaching we readily acknowledge as the apostolic foundation. The apostles’ practice, in laying the foundation of the Church, is also normative. For example, in Acts 14 they ordained elders in every place. That is not just a passing note of

historical interest. That is the apostles' laying the foundation of the Church. Their practice of the plurality of elders is normative. Similarly, when they gather the church on the first day of the week, they are using the first day of the week as functionally the same as the seventh day in the Old Testament time. That change is in fulfillment of Christ's claim of Lordship over the Sabbath. It was as important as the seventh day was. It was not absolute. It was transitory, and Christ being Lord of the Sabbath changes it to the first day of the week, which in Revelation 1:10 is called "the Lord's Day." It is specific. The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. In a special sense, in His authority as Lord of the Sabbath, there has been that change. Someone has called it the symbolic weight of the commandment. That is, it anticipates now the great harvest of salvation in the end times. It is the first day of the new creation. It is the day that God sends His Holy Spirit, and there is a reversal of the tower of Babel. Everything is now looking forward, in light of Christ's resurrection, to its fulfillment. Whereas the Old Testament looked backward over the six preceding days, the first day celebration looks forward to the general resurrection and the new heavens and the new earth. The change is made in that it may reflect that participatory nature. There is also certainly a change in the day. There is also a change in terms of it being a matter of a religious obligation. It cannot be legislated as it was in the theocracy, and so the early Christians do not expect that their labor will not continue on the first day of the week. But it is so significant. They get up early to have this gathering, this holy convocation before work or after work, but that is not ideal. As the Gospel goes forth, it affects culture. I think that in our day, we should not argue that the Sabbath be legislated as in the theocracy as a matter of religious obligation but as a matter of human welfare and justice. It is appropriate in matters of legislation because it says that there is something more than consumerism. There is only so much money to spend. Why can we not spend it in six days? There is a movement—I think it comes from Canada—that we all agree that there will be one day in which we do not buy anything. I think it is in order to show that there is more to life than being a consumer. Well, we have 52 of those a year if we take the Sabbath principle seriously. However, we are now, culturally, so much into consumerism that it is hard to imagine cutting back unless Christians take it seriously. It would not be insignificant if we stopped going to the mall (or wherever) on the Lord's Day and taking it seriously.

My third point is that there are some texts that are apparently counter to continuance of the Sabbath under the new covenant. There are three of these. Let us take them in order. Romans 14:5 says, "One man considers one day more sacred than another. Another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." Some people take that to mean that the weekly Sabbath is left to the individual. If you want to do that to the Lord, that is fine, but do not elevate that to something that has the authority of a divine command. I think the appropriate response to that is that, as a matter of fact, the early church did treat the Lord's Day in a way that was different from the others. We have seen apostolic practice. Weekly attendance was not simply optional. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Do not forsake the holy convocation." That is part of the ongoing purpose of the Sabbath against the background of rest from our ordinary labors. There are many other days in the Jewish calendar and other calendars that people adopted for spiritual discipline and so forth. Why not think of those as being the kinds of days that are in view here because, as a matter of fact, the church called one day the Lord's Day. That is the day that the Lord reserved for Himself in some measure. That was the original idea of the Sabbath being hallowed by God Himself. Galatians 4:10-11 is a similar text. There may be a slight difference of nuance, but it says, "You are observing special days and months and season and years. I fear for you lest somehow I have wasted my efforts on you." These are not weekly days. They are special days, months, seasons, and years. They are the wider aspects of the Jewish calendar, and they are being observed for legalistic motives. So Paul has a double argument against those kinds of things. He does not regard this as left to the individual, as he did in Romans. Here, when people have elevated them to a necessity, he speaks against them but not against the weekly Sabbath.

This is also the point of Colossians 2:16-17, which appears to be the strongest of these counter texts. Colossians 2:16-17 says, “Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that are to come.” Actually, the New Revised Standard Version is a better translation because it retains the plural. “Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths.” They are all in the plural—“festivals, new moons or Sabbaths. You see, the term “Sabbath” in the Old Testament applied to feast days besides the weekly day of rest. This is not “the” Sabbath. These are sabbaths along with new moons and festivals, and this was clearly distinguished from the weekly Sabbath in the Old Testament, which is what the fourth commandment is about. So I think that that is a plausible explanation of this text that seems to be counter, especially when you realize it is in the plural. Of course, you could argue that the Sabbath is 52 a year, but in the context of new moons and festivals, those were particular Jewish regulations that did have a symbolic element that is hard to find in the fourth commandment that would make it a shadow of Christ.

My fourth major point is the weekly Sabbath in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is the chapter on religious worship and the Sabbath Day. The Westminster divines, when you look at what they wrote, saw the function of the day wholly (entirely, I should say) in terms of corporate or private worship. They say that the whole time is to be occupied with the duties of public and private worship, except allowances for necessity and mercy. I think that it would be better to understand the sanctification of the whole day as the consecration of labor. Certainly, the holy convocation is part of that, but the holy convocation is in the context of rest. Leviticus 23:3 says, “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly, holy convocation. You are not to do any work.” You see there the coordination of “rest” and “convocation.” I think that the Westminster Confession tends to obscure the central purpose of the Sabbath as rest in going beyond what can be proved from Scripture to prescribe the whole time to be occupied with the duties of public and private worship. If you took it literally (and I am not sure that they meant for it to be taken literally), that is what they said—the whole time is to consist only of duties of public and private worship except for matters of need and mercy. I think that it draws us away from the coordination of rest and worship that is more clearly the point of Leviticus 23:3 and the apostolic pattern. I think that the full Sabbath principle can only be worked out where we have both of those elements together. In some cases, you have to work as a matter of necessity if you are in a culture where it is a matter of survival that conditions what you are able to respond to. Other aspects that fall under necessity clearly mean that some folks, even as the priests in the Old Testament, continue their weekday work for the sake of human benefit. The Sabbath has never been intended to cut across that.